

2015

Here We  
Come!



RYERSON UNIVERSITY

# A HUMUMENT

(Altered Book)

by

ENGLISH BA  
CLASS OF 2015

August 16, 2011

Jonathan Culler

## LITERARY THEORY

A Very Short Introduction

ENG 108 The Nature of Narrative I

Life

Inconceivable

we ask

Where

narrative

gives

experience

foundational course

in

students

fiction

history

periods and media in order to

under

storytelling

goals

strategies and rhetorical

effect

poetry

and drama as well

in

texts.

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Katrina  
Whitnell

Daniel  
Gomez

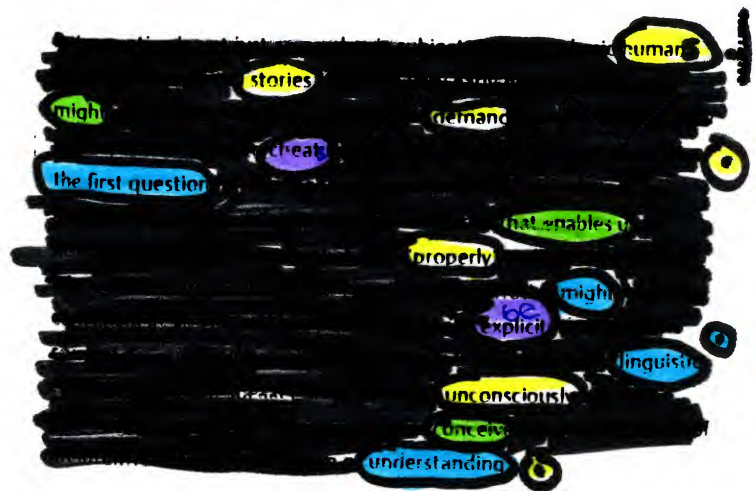
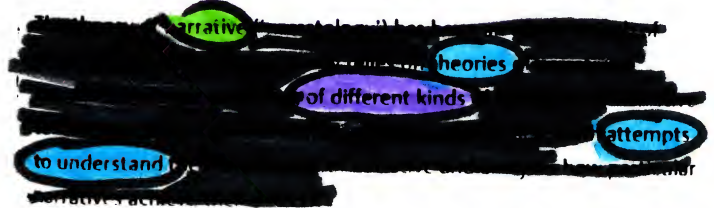
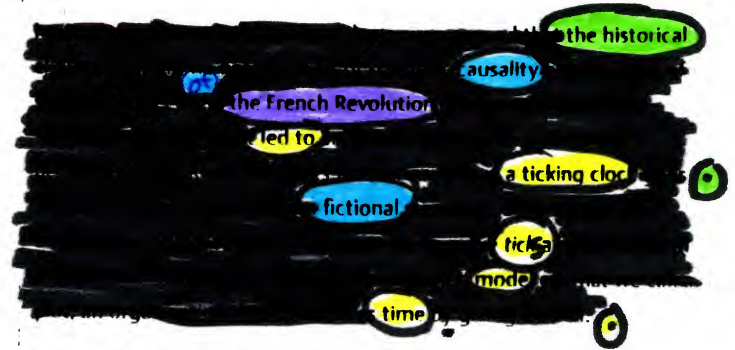
# Narrative by Dylan Day and Phoenix

Simms  
OK

Once upon a time literature meant above all poetry. The novel was a modern upstart, too close to biography or chronicle to be genuinely literary, a popular form that could not aspire to the high callings of lyric and epic poetry. But in the twentieth century the novel has eclipsed poetry, both as what writers write and what readers read and, since the 1960s, narrative has come to dominate literary education as well. People still study poetry, often, it is required, but novels and short stories have become the core of the curriculum.

This is not just a result of the preference of mass readership, who happily pick up stories but seldom read poems. Literary and cultural theory have increasingly claimed cultural centrality for narrative. Stories, the argument goes, are the main way we make sense of things, whether in thinking of our lives as a progression leading somewhere or in telling ourselves what is happening in the world. Scientific explanation makes sense of things by placing them under laws: whenever a and b obtains, c will occur, but life is generally not like that. It follows a non-scientific logic of cause and effect but the logic of story, where to understand is to conceive of how one thing leads to another, how something might have come about, how Maggie ended up selling software in Singapore, how George's father came to give him a car.

We make sense of events through possible stories: philosophy of human beings.



P5

Daniella Armstrong  
and  
Amy Driedger.



## Plot

What are the elemental requirements of a story? Aristotle says that plot is the most basic feature of narrative, that good stories must have a beginning, middle, and end, and that they give pleasure because of the rhythm of their ordering. But what creates the impression that a particular series of events has this shape? Theorists have proposed various accounts. Essentially, though, a plot requires a transformation. There must be an initial situation, a change involving some sort of reversal, and a resolution that makes the change insignificant. Some theories emphasize types of parallelism that produce satisfactory plots, such as the move from one relationship between characters to its opposite, or from a fear or prediction to its realization or its inversion; from a problem to its solution, or from a false accusation or misrepresentation to its rectification. In each case we find the association of a development on the level of events with a transformation on the level of theme. A mere sequence of events does not make a story. There must be an end relating back to the beginning - according to some theorists, an end that indicates what has happened to the desire that led to the events the story narrates.

narrative. If we are to talk about narrative competence, it must be also of readers' ability to identify plot. Readers can tell that two works are versions of the same story; they can summarize plots and discuss the adequacy of a plot summary. It's not that they will always agree, but disagreements are likely to reveal considerable shared understanding. The theory of narrative postulates the existence of a level of structure - what we generally call plot - independent of any particular language or representational medium. Until poetry, which gets lost in translation, plot can be preserved in translation from one language or one medium into another. Silent film or a comic strip can have the same plot as a short story.

We discover, though, that there are two ways of thinking about plot.

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to make.

Plot is a way of shaping events into a plot in their genuine attempts to make sense of things. A single plot is what gets shaped by narratives as they present the same events in different ways. So sequence of acts by three characters can be shaped by writers and readers into a plot about heterosexual love, or a young man's desire resisted by potential opposites, or a twist of events alluding to some future to come. Together, the plot with the characters is presented in narrative from the point of view of the suffering hero, or the angry man, or the puzzled man, or the external observer, or the omniscient narrator, or the character's innermost feelings, or who is the knowing distance from these positions. From this angle, the plot of a story is the given and the discourse is the varied presentations of it.

The two levels we are discussing are the function of opposition between events and plot, and between story and discourse.

events/plot

story/discourse

The plot is the material that is presented, ordered from a certain point of view by the discourse (different versions of the same story). Plot itself is the shaping of events into a plot, or the wedding of the happy ending to the beginning of a story, or the middle. What readers actually encounter, though, is the discourse of the plot, something we infer from the text, and the idea that the plot is formed through the construction of the reader. We talk about events that have happened, but we highlight the meaningfulness and organization of the plot.

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Danilo P. Alessandro R.

By: Madison Maher  
Lynbert Fernandez





Mr. Sun, sun, Mr. golden  
Sun

## Presentation

The basic distinction of the theory of narrative is between plot and presentation, story and discourse. The terminology varies somewhat (and often) from one school to another. Confronted with the term that includes naming and other representations, the reader makes sense of it by identifying the story, i.e. seeing the text as one particular way of presenting that story; by identifying what happens we are able to think of the verbal material as the way of portraying what takes place. Then we can ask what type of presentation has been chosen and what difference that makes. These variables are crucial to narratives' effects. Much narrative theory explores different ways of conceiving these variables. Here are some key questions that identify meaningful variation.

**Who speaks?** A conventional narrative is said to have a narrator, who may stand outside the story or be a character within it. Theists distinguish first-person narrators where a narrator says 'I' from a somewhat confusingly called 'third-person narrator' where there is no 'I'. The latter may be seen as a character in the story and all the characters are referred to in the third person, as 'he' or 'she'. First-person narrators may be the main protagonists of the story, or they may be observers of the story, whose role is to report facts to the reader. First-person observers may be fully developed as individuals with a name, story and personality, or they may not be developed at all and quickly fade from sight as the narrative goes on, affacing themselves after introducing the story.

**Who speaks to whom?** The author creates a text which is read by readers. Readers can hear from the text a voice which speaks to them. The narrator addresses listeners who are sometimes explicitly constructed as sometimes explicitly identified (especially in stories within stories) where one character becomes the narrator and tells the inner story.

Geraldine

other characters. The narrator's position is often called the point of view. Whether or not the narrator is explicitly identified, the narrative implicitly constructs an audience to whom the narration takes for granted what it explains. The narrator's position and what it explains implies an audience that recognizes certain references and shares certain assumptions. That a modern reader may not share feminist assumptions has been especially interested in the way that American literature frequently positions male readers to the texts implicitly addressed to them who share a common view.

What is the time of the story? The time at which events occur (as distinct from the time at which the events are narrated) is a key question. Is the story happening in the past, present or future? Telling may immediately follow particular events as in epistolary novels (written in the form of letters, e.g. Richardson's *Pamela*) where each letter deals with what had happened up to the time of writing, as is the case with the letters of the *Letters from a Young Woman*. The narrator looks back on the entire sequence.

**Who speaks what language?** Narrative voices may have their own distinctive language, which they use to tell the story. They may also report the language of others. A narrative may tell things through the language of a child, or through the language of an adult. The child's language is often used to represent the child's perspective on the world. The language of the adult is often used to represent the adult's perspective on the world. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel is based on the idea of multiple voices or dialogues rather than a single voice. The essence of the novel is the different voices or dialogues and the clash between different perspectives.

Who speaks with what attitude? The narrator's attitude towards the story and the characters is a key question. The narrator may tell the story with a happy disposition, or with a sad disposition, or with a neutral disposition. The narrator's attitude towards the story and the characters is a key question. The narrator may tell the story with a happy disposition, or with a sad disposition, or with a neutral disposition.

Alan  
"Ok guy, I guess"  
Richardson

Elijah  
Kazlauskas



hesitant

...wondered if she was thinking ever...  
 sometimes unreliable...  
 ...self-conscious...  
 ...hesitate...  
 ...highlight the problem of narrative authority

## Focalization

Who sees? Discussions of narrative frequently speak of the point of view from which the story is told but this use of point of view confuses two separate questions: who speaks? and whose vision is presented? Henry James's novel Maisie employs a narrator who is a child but represents the story from the perspective of the adult Maisie. Maisie is the narrator, she is described in the third person, as 'she', but the events are seen through her perspective. Maisie does not fully understand...  
 ...adults...  
 ...the theories of narrative: Mikhail Bakhtin and Genette...  
 ...the question of who speaks? is...  
 ...question of...  
 ...variables here...  
 ...Temporal...  
 ...shortly afterward...  
 ...long afterward...  
 ...the time of the event or...  
 ...something that happened to her... a child, a narrator, may focalize the

Val 😊

Narayan

...the consciousness...  
 ...Or, of course...  
 ...When...  
 ...seemed...  
 ...choice of temporal focalization makes an enormous...  
 ...effect...  
 ...recount...  
 ...each moment...  
 ...knowledge...

Distance and speed...  
 ...proceeding slowly...  
 ...telling us...  
 ...when...  
 ...to speed...  
 ...in frequency...  
 ...happened...  
 ...could not happen...  
 ...what regularly happened...

Limitation...  
 ...very limited...  
 ...recounting...  
 ...thoughts...  
 ...on...  
 ...understanding...  
 ...seem localized...  
 ...with human activities...  
 ...head...  
 ...to rise...  
 ...localized...  
 ...spaced out...

Hannah Lewis

Leah Gillis



the innermost thoughts  
and hidden motives of the characters:  
still not satisfied:  
in principle no limitations  
not only in traditional tales  
in modern novels

primarily through consciousness  
first person narration  
and in third person narration  
can result from limitations  
When we gain a sense  
the events as  
story-readers would

These and other variations  
determine  
the feelings and hidden motivations of protagonists,  
displaying knowledge  
may highlight, for  
example, what people intend  
'Little did he know that two hours later he would be run over'  
point of view of a single protagonist  
unpredictability  
everything that occurs  
may be a surprise  
heightened by the embedding of stories within other stories  
the act of telling a story  
become a principal concern  
Stories within stories

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## What's in it for

Thenarists also discuss the function of stories. In the second Chapter 2  
that 'narrative display texts' a class which includes both literary  
narratives and stories people tell one another. Aristotle because their  
stories are tellable, 'worth it'. Story-tellers are always working off the  
potential question: 'So what?' But what makes a story 'worth it'? What  
do stories do?

First they give pleasure. Aristotle tells us through their  
imitation of life and their rhythm. The narrative patterning that  
produces a twist, as when the biter is bitten or the tables are turned,  
gives pleasure in itself, and many narrators have essentially this  
function: to amuse listeners by giving a new twist to familiar situations.

The pleasure of narrative is linked to desire. Plots tell of desire and what  
befalls it, but the movement of narrative itself is driven by desire in the  
form of 'epistemophilia', a desire to know. We want to discover secrets,  
to know the end, to find the truth. If what drives narrative is the  
'masculine' urge to mastery, the desire to unveil the truth (the 'naked  
truth'), then what of the knowledge that narrative offers us to satisfy  
that wish? Is that knowledge itself an effect of desire? Thenarists ask such  
questions about the link between desire, stories, and knowledge.

For stories also have the function. Thenarists have emphasized, of  
teaching us about the world, showing us how it works, enabling us  
through the devices of focalization to see things from other people's  
points of view, and to understand other motives that are generally opaque to  
us. The novelist E. M. Forster argues that in offering the possibility of  
perfect knowledge of others, novels compensate for our dimness about  
others in 'real' life. Characters in novels

are people whose secret lives are visible or might be visible. We see  
people whose secret lives are invisible. And that is why novels, even when

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East End

Story Machine  
collective



~~Knowledge is power~~ **We** **need** **knowledge of the world**

team  
haven







Narcolepsy strikes again!

Team  
haven

Jonathan Culler

# LITERARY THEORY

A Very Short Introduction

ENG 108 The Nature of Nar

life without stories? Inconceivable

from "narrative" steps in giving

introducing students to fictional

examine the underlying technical

strategies and rhetorical effects

cinematic and digital texts.

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ative I  
ble. The moment "W" "I" or "Where did I come  
shaps identity and experience. This foundational course  
orms of historical periods and media in order to  
storytelling, narratives, goals, inner structures.  
Texts may include stories, novels, poetry and drama as well as

2 RA